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John Lockhart

Most mail coming into the Library this spring was shrink-wrapped and stored on pallets in the Cabin Branch, Maryland, warehouse.

Pandemic Mail Backlog Cleared

All mail stored off-site this spring has now been sorted and delivered.

BY WENDI A. MALONEY

When the Library introduced maximum telework in March to help stop the spread of COVID-19, a decision had to be made about incoming mail. For reasons of health and safety, only a small percentage of staff could remain in Library facilities, too few to process the enormous amount of mail that comes to the Library – more than 38,000 letters and over 8,000 packages on an average month.

Starting on March 25, therefore, most incoming mail began to be rerouted to the Library's Cabin Branch, Maryland, warehouse for storage, awaiting the return of staff who could process it. Little did the Library know at the time that

the arrangement would continue for three months straight as the pandemic continued to affect the Washington, D.C., area.

By June 22, the first day of the Library's phased restoration of on-site operations, 221 pallets of mail sat in the warehouse. Yet by July 31, none were left. Their contents – an estimated 100,000-plus letters and more than 20,000 packages – had all been delivered to the Madison Building.

Urged on by end-of-fiscal-year deadlines, staff there worked rotating shifts as incoming pallets arrived to sort and deliver mail to service units and divisions, allowing the Library to clear the backlog

MAIL BACKLOG, CONTINUED ON 7

DONATED TIME

The following employees have satisfied eligibility requirements to receive leave donations from other staff members. Contact Lisa Davis at (202) 707-0033.

Shayerah Akhtar
Craig Andrews
Sharif Adenan
Lynette Brown
Eric Clark

Laurie Harris
Sharron Jones
Terri Harris-Wandix
Donna Williams

COVID-19 UPDATE

The Library's Health Services Division (HSD) continues to monitor Library staff members with symptoms, clinical diagnoses or positive test results for COVID-19. On Aug. 13, HSD announced that seven employees reported symptoms associated with COVID-19 last week. No contact tracing was necessary for these cases, because the individuals involved had either not been in Library buildings or had adhered strictly to the transmission-control measures implemented by the Library. Some employees reporting symptoms are not diagnosed to have COVID-19, but, out of caution, the Library is monitoring all reports of symptoms.

HSD is communicating with all staff members who become ill. In cases in which ill individuals were present in Library buildings, HSD is also notifying their close work contacts and cleaning and disinfecting the areas affected. The same process is being followed when contractors in Library buildings become ill.

More information on the Library's pandemic response: <https://go.usa.gov/xdtv5> (intranet) or <https://go.usa.gov/xdtVQ> (public-facing staff web page)

LIBRARY STAFF SURVEY: SHARE YOUR VIEWS

This year, in place of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, the Human Capital Directorate is administering a two-part survey developed specifically for the Library. It seeks to capture cross-Library feedback and quantifiable information to help Library leaders better understand and respond to the needs of staff during this unprecedented time. The information gathered will inform Library policies on communication, productivity, training and engagement. The deadline to complete the survey is Aug. 28.

Take the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LOCCOVID192020>

Questions? Contact AskHCD via the HCD Portal: <https://bit.ly/33qvZBT>

ACCESSING LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION ON CONGRESS.GOV

Sept. 10, 10 a.m. to noon

Webex, <https://bit.ly/3kQUQVD>

The Library is hosting a virtual public forum on Sept. 10 focused on public access to legislative information through Congress.gov. It will provide an update on improvements to Congress.gov, which is the authoritative repository of U.S. congressional data, and the Library's role in providing access to legislative information. The forum will also give Congress.gov users an opportunity to provide feedback to help guide the development of new features.

Request ADA accommodations five business days in advance at 202-707-6362 or ADA@loc.gov.

GAZETTE

LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS

loc.gov/staff/gazette

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MISSION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Library's central mission is to engage, inspire and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

ABOUT THE GAZETTE

An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at loc.gov/staff/gazette.

GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF

Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.—Ed.

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GAZETTE DEADLINES

The deadline for editorial copy for the Sept. 4 Gazette is Wednesday, Aug. 26.

Email editorial copy and letters to the editor to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

To promote events through the Library's online calendar (www.loc.gov/loc/events) and the Gazette Calendar, email event and contact information to calendar@loc.gov by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

PBS to Broadcast TV Special on Book Festival

The 2020 Library of Congress National Book Festival will include two new entry points for audiences across the country for the first time – a national television special on PBS stations and an interactive experience online for the festival's 20th year.

PBS stations will broadcast "The Library of Congress National Book Festival: Celebrating American Ingenuity," a two-hour program featuring some of the nation's most renowned authors and literary voices, on Sept. 27 from 6 to 8 p.m. The television special will be hosted by Hoda Kotb of NBC News' "Today." It will also be available for on-demand streaming online and through the PBS app.

"The 2020 National Book Festival will reach an even bigger audience of book lovers during these challenging times, thanks to our collaboration with PBS and public broadcast stations across the country to present this television special," said Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden.

The broadcast will follow a week-end of virtual festivities online that will be accessible at loc.gov/book-fest, including on-demand videos, live author chats and discussions, options to personalize one's journey through the festival with timely topics and book buying possibilities. The full festival lineup (<https://go.usa.gov/xftTV>) was announced in July.

To create the broadcast, the Library is collaborating with PBS Books, a national programming initiative produced by Detroit Public Television. PBS, the Library's broadcast partner for the popular Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, will distribute the two-hour book festival broadcast to PBS stations nationally.

"We are delighted to be partnering again with PBS and the Library of Congress, our nation's beloved monument to letters and literacy," said Rich Homberg, president and CEO of Detroit Public TV. "We have

had the privilege of covering the National Book Festival since 2015, and now we have the opportunity to produce a prime-time special connecting people who write great books with the people who love to read them."

The special will feature a variety of presentations and interviews by two dozen of the nation's most beloved literary voices. They will join thousands of book lovers across the country to celebrate American ingenuity – what it means to them, how it fires their imaginations and why books are so important to us in these times. Throughout the program, the writers Walter Isaacson, Sandra Cisneros and Amy Tan will offer

commentary.

Among the featured authors will be Pulitzer Prize winner and 2020 recipient of the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction, Colson Whitehead; former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; National Ambassador for Young People's Literature Jason Reynolds; Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Jon Meacham on Rep. John Lewis; Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie; fantasy novelist Leigh Bardugo; and John Grisham, master of the legal thriller.

For a full lineup, including additional luminaries to appear, go to <https://go.usa.gov/xftb4>. ■

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE



Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden moderated an online discussion on Monday between former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Elaine Weiss, author of "The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote." Sponsored by the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission, the conversation was titled "Women's Fight for the Vote: Celebrating 100 Years of the 19th Amendment." Watch on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/34akjDE>.

Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission

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Experiment Explores Automated Transcription

A proof-of-concept tool tests capabilities of commercial speech-to-text programs.

BY SAHAR KAZMI

For over 130 years, the Library has been building the most comprehensive collection of audiovisual works in the world, with new items added every day. As home of the American Folklife Center (AFC) and the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center, the Library has items from century-old wax-cylinder recordings of traditional folk songs to crisp, high-definition recordings of this year's congressional floor proceedings.

Whether a recording was made a century ago or yesterday, accurate transcripts are an essential tool for making audiovisual collections accessible and discoverable.

Unfortunately, little from the collections has been transcribed, because ensuring the level of accuracy needed to support Library research has traditionally required costly and time-consuming manual transcription.

That may be changing. Speech-to-text technology has improved in recent years, with a variety of automated transcription programs now readily available. With that in mind, an interdisciplinary team from the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) and AFC has been exploring the software and processes needed to create accurate automated transcripts of oral recordings and multimedia content, with the hope of finding a solution for fast, precise and affordable transcriptions of the Library's holdings.

This summer, Chris Adams, solutions architect in OCIO's IT Design and Development Directorate, and Julia Kim, a former AFC digital assets specialist who is now digital projects coordinator for the National Library Service for



Elena Olivo

Julia Kim

the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), released their speech-to-text viewer – a proof-of-concept tool developed in collaboration with LC Labs and others across the Library to experiment with the quality and accuracy of one current out-of-the-box transcription product.

The tool leverages the Amazon Transcribe service to provide a searchable display for users to follow along with an audio transcription from AFC's spoken-word collections while listening to the content in real-time. To help users judge the quality of the transcription, the speech-to-text viewer shows a transcription's self-assessed accuracy – from zero to 100 percent – in the same display.

The experiment, available publicly on the LC Labs page for a limited time (<https://go.usa.gov/xfQUV>), helped Adams and Kim explore the capabilities and limits of modern text-to-speech software.

"Although it does significantly lessen the work needed to make these recordings accessible, speech-to-text software doesn't eliminate the need for human intervention," said Adams.

The experiment showed that the speech recognition system's accuracy ratings varied significantly depending on AFC's source material, some of which contained regional or idiosyncratic speech. Adams and Kim hypothesize that those sorts of regional speech



Kristy Sundberg

Chris Adams

differences – and poor "signal-to-noise" ratios caused by artifacts produced during migrations from earlier analog recordings to digital files – were simply not incorporated into the machine-learning training sets used to teach the transcription program how to recognize language.

A production-level automated transcription pipeline for the Library would require a workflow for processing materials, reviewing results and updating reprocessing models until the quality of the results consistently meets human levels. Evolving speech-to-text technology, including machine learning, offers significant opportunities to scale up the LC Labs test from a one-off experiment.

The speech-to-text experiment also highlighted important questions about how automated transcription might be used at the Library. Issues such as how non-English recordings should be handled, what accuracy thresholds are required to meet user needs and when to include manual review all require additional consideration.

"This project is a first step, but we hope our experiment reveals newly accessible paths toward establishing more natural and intuitive engagements with all the Library's materials," said Kim, who is continuing to explore related technologies with Adams in support of NLS. ■



Denise McCray

Deanna McCray-James

Deanna McCray-James is a public access officer in the Communications Office.

Tell us a little about your background.

I was born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Prince George's County, Maryland. I graduated from Forestville High School and attended an in-state school and Saint Augustine's University – a historically Black college or university – before ultimately graduating with a bachelor's degree in management from the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), now University of Maryland Global Campus. I subsequently earned a master's degree in public relations and a master's degree in business administration from UMUC.

Before serving as the Library's public access officer, I spent a decade-plus in association management. I began as a legislative assistant and migrated through positions in membership, education, governance and communications. I worked for trade associations in the security, chemical, construction management and green building industries. Before ending that part of my career, I was executive director of the National Candle Association.

What brought you to the Library, and what do you do?

I was born and raised here – literally and figuratively. I joke that I was at the Library before the Madison Building was since my mother was pregnant with me while working here. On my first visit to the Great Hall as a toddler, I took the photo shown in this interview with Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin during a Library Christmas celebration.

Many of my family members have also worked here – 19 to be exact – including my mother, father, grandmother, sister and son. A little-known fun fact is that my grandmother started here in 1963 and was once an elevator operator in the Jefferson Building.

When my current position was posted, my mom sent the announcement to me. I was completing my master's in public relations with a concentration in crisis communications at the time, and the job seemed like a good fit.

I manage the mass e-mail communications, emergency communications, inclement weather updates and external communications about access to public programs. I love what I do, because I have the opportunity to work with different people and service units as well as ensure the masses know about the multitude of offerings we have here for everyone.

The moral of the story: Always listen to your mother.

What are some of your standout projects?

One of my proudest accomplishments is the semiannual open house. The event grew out of discussions in 2007 in the Public Access Coordinating Committee about how to respond to members of the public who wanted to enter the Main Reading Room just to see its magnificence. After discussion and negotiations with Library stakeholders, the committee submitted a proposal to the Librarian's office.

A little more than a decade later, the open house is a huge suc-

cess – receiving more than 8,000 people annually into that beautiful space. Now, divisions from around the Library participate and offer visitors interactive experiences throughout the Jefferson Building.

Last summer, I was selected as a fellow in the Leadership Development Program. It has been an amazing opportunity that has entailed a lot of self-reflection and analysis. I've learned not only about how to lead and build effective teams, but also about the importance of vulnerability and emotional intelligence in supporting the Library's mission.

I just completed a 120-day acting supervisory detail in the Internships and Fellowships Programs. It involved serving as a project mentor to three junior fellows in the Center for Literacy, Learning and Engagement. It was a major part of the fellowship and was a wonderful experience that I will never forget.

What are your interests outside work?

I am an active member of my sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., which allows me to give back to the community. I also spend time working in my professional organization, the National Press Club. I have chaired the events team and had fun bringing programs like an Irish whiskey tasting and Virginia winery tours to members. I now serve on the Headliners Team, which brings speakers from around the country to the club. Last month, I had the privilege of bringing the outgoing and incoming presidents of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives to the club for a timely discussion on 21st-century policing.

What is something some of your co-workers may not know about you?

My co-workers may not know that I am deathly afraid of heights and snakes. Oh, I am also a "pageant girl," having won the titles of Mrs. District of Columbia America 2009 and Mrs. Maryland United States 2005. ■

MAIL BACKLOG, CONTINUED FROM 1

and resume normal mail operations on Aug. 3.

“It was pretty amazing, to be honest,” Matthew Martin, director of the Operations Division of Integrated Support Services, said of the effort, executed in just six weeks. He oversees the Logistics Division in Cabin Branch and the Customer Experience Division, which manages the Library’s mail contractor, Novitex. “Our staff worked very hard to ensure mail was delivered properly and nothing was lost.”

Under normal circumstances, packages and mail addressed to the Library go first to an off-site facility in Capitol Heights, Maryland, where Novitex screens them. It tests for chemicals and makes sure no prohibited material is included. After a 48-hour quarantine period, the mail proceeds to the Madison Building, where it is sorted and delivered.

Novitex continued to screen mail in Capitol Heights during the pandemic. But instead of delivering it to the Madison Building, its employees shrink-wrapped mail in batches, placed it on pallets and shipped it to Cabin Branch. Library staff there – four rotated on and off with a minimum of one present at all times – accepted the pallets, organizing them by when they were received.

When phase one, part one, of on-site operations restoration began on June 22, Novitex continued to deliver pallets to Cabin Branch. At the same time, however, a logistics driver started bringing stored pallets back to the Madison Building, where two staff members offloaded them.

“We wanted to deliver it in date order,” Martin said of the stored mail. “We didn’t want new mail delivered to the Madison on the first day of phase one while there was still the March 25 mail in Cabin Branch.”

For the first week or so, logistics staff transported five pallets back

to the Madison Building each workday. A decision was made to start slowly, Martin said, to “kind of get the flow.”

Much of the stored material was addressed to the U.S. Copyright Office and the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate (ABA). “It was really two main offices that were going to receive the brunt of these packages,” Martin said. “How much could they process as they restarted on-site operations?”

As it turned out, quite a lot. By the first week of July, 12 pallets – the most that fit on a truck at once – were arriving at the Madison loading dock daily. As that was happening, Novitex continued to deliver three or four pallets a day to Cabin Branch.

“It was a net of seven or eight being subtracted from the backlog every day,” Martin said, until the final pallets were delivered on July 31.

“We never had to stop,” he added. “Once delivery started, there was never a day Copyright or ABA asked us to hold their mail.”

For ABA, processing the backlogged mail was especially urgent. The directorate has an Aug. 31 deadline to receive all shipments and invoices for fiscal 2020, so payments can be made by Sept. 9. ABA acquires and catalogs materials for the Library’s collections.

“It’s crunch time right now,” said Angela Kinney, chief of ABA’s African, Latin American and Western European Division (ALAWWE).

Jonathan Miyashiro, an ABA supervisory library technician, oversaw processing of mail arriving from Cabin Branch in the directorate’s Acquisitions Fiscal, Overseas and Support Division mailroom in LM B-47. ALAWWE section heads Monique Graham, Francisco Macías and Hector Morey volunteered to rotate with Miyashiro to supervise the operation until all the pallets were cleared out.

During the first two parts of phase-one operations restoration – phase one, part two, started on

July 20 – staff can work on-site no more than 40 hours a pay period, necessitating rotation of supervisors.

Each workday, teams of four to six ABA staff broke down pallets arriving from Cabin Branch and opened boxes. Books were barcoded, stamped and targeted with security strips, then materials were placed on flatbeds and transferred to ABA offices on the ground and fifth floors of the Madison Building.

“What at first seemed like a daunting task, quickly became an achievable one,” Morey said. “The team was focused on allowing ABA divisions to continue operations productively. The challenge was eliminating the backlog while not overwhelming the limited on-site staff in ABA sections responsible for processing incoming materials.”

Once materials arrived at their destinations, a workflow began that involves checking newly received items against invoices, confirming the existence of cataloging and other records in the Integrated Library System and expending Library funds.

This workflow continues as materials arrive through the regular mail-delivery process. Since his arrival recently, ABA’s newly appointed permanent mailroom supervisor, Adrian Korz, has been overseeing the mailroom.

While this work is ongoing, ABA on-site section heads are also preparing books needing cataloging for pickup by ABA teleworkers – they can schedule times to come to the Library to retrieve up to 60 books at a time – and setting aside materials for binding and shelving during later stages of operations restoration.

“I would describe it as herculean” Kinney said of ABA’s effort. “But there’s also an element of excitement – we’re helping ABA meet its mission to acquire for the nation. I’m pretty proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish.” ■